

## FSM Information Services

### Press Release

#### **President Panuelo Discusses Caroline Islands Air Flying Domestically in November & Absentee Ballot Voting in Guam & Hawaii with Committee to Wait**

PALIKIR, Pohnpei— The 21<sup>st</sup> Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) began its Eighth Special Session on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020. After the opening session, His Excellency David W. Panuelo and the Honorable Yosiwo P. George received the Committee to Wait on the President, chaired by the Honorable Esmond B. Moses, Vice Speaker of the 21<sup>st</sup> FSM Congress, with committee member the Honorable Ferny S. Perman, Chairman of the Congressional Committee on Health and Social Affairs.

Arguably the key item on the agenda, superseding others in both time and gravitas, was discussion regarding a recent proposed appropriation of fourteen million dollars (\$14,000,000) in public projects, and the current lack of projected revenue to fund this appropriation in full. The public projects represent varied and essential support across a range of sectors, from streetlights and local Government subsidies in Kosrae, to food security and school construction projects in Chuuk. It is the view of the Executive Branch that the 21<sup>st</sup> FSM Congress' commitments to the citizens of the Nation should not be compromised, particularly during this time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As such, it was the President's recommendation that Congress seek to even the gap by using unallotted or otherwise unused funding from public projects never initiated some years prior, as opposed to other discussed alternative solutions.

The next item on the agenda concerned legislation the President has transmitted to Congress to temporarily suspend the use of in-person-voting at the Nation's Special Polling Places in Hawaii and Guam, so as to promote the use of absentee ballots. President Panuelo made the case that the Nation cannot know how dangerous Guam and Hawaii may be during the March, 2021 election, and so it is critical for election officials to begin educating voters to prepare to submit their requests for absentee ballots as soon as possible. The Government strongly encourages citizens living abroad to begin planning on voting using an absentee ballot.

Following discussion on the March 2021 election was a conversation regarding the status of the Nation's capacity to operate domestic flights. The President updated Vice Speaker Moses and Senator Perman that the Department of Justice and Caroline Islands Air, the Nation's domestic air carrier, have successfully brought in the new pilot from the Republic of Kiribati, for a total of two pilots altogether, which is the number required to fly the 19-seater Y-12 aircraft presently located in Weno. It is the intent of the Government that the two pilots will leave for Chuuk State on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 via patrol boat. After carrying out routine preventive maintenance and flight testing,

Caroline Islands Air will be able to perform domestic transportation duties once again, complete with a sustainable and transparent schedule.

The remainder of the meeting focused on topics such as the FSM's proposed membership with the International Police Organization (INTERPOL), nominees to the Board of the FSM Trust Fund and the Board of the FSM Telecommunications Corporation, and repatriation efforts of FSM citizens from the Republic of the Marshall Islands. "I remain committed to repatriation of FSM citizens from the Marshall Islands this month," President Panuelo said. "We will publicly release relevant information about the repatriation efforts once the technical components are finalized and it is clear that there will no delays or alterations thereof."

The meeting ended on a positive note, with President Panuelo extending his appreciation to the 21<sup>st</sup> FSM Congress for their steadfast and exemplary leadership in tackling issues both complex and necessary for the Nation's development and improved quality of life for its citizens.



**Pictured Above:** President Panuelo shakes hands with Senator Perman



**Pictured Above:** President Panuelo excitedly shares his enthusiasm about the resumption of domestic air service with Caroline Islands Air



**Pictured Above:** Senators Perman & Moses listen carefully as President Panuelo expresses his view on a subject of import